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REMARKS

**Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
And Nigerian Foreign Minister Olugbenga Ashiru
After Their Meeting**

**September 29, 2011
Treaty Room
Washington, D.C.**

SECRETARY CLINTON: Good afternoon, everyone. I am very pleased to have the foreign minister of Nigeria here, and I will address the concerns that we discussed. But I first want to begin with a statement about the assault on Ambassador Robert Ford and our Embassy staff in Syria this morning.

We condemn this unwarranted attack in the strongest possible terms. Ambassador Ford and his aides were conducting normal Embassy business, and this attempt to intimidate our diplomats through violence is wholly unjustified.

We immediately raised this incident with the Syrian Government, and we are demanding that they take every possible step to protect our diplomats according to their obligations under international law. Ambassador Ford has shown admirable courage putting himself on the line to bear witness to the situation on the ground in Syria. He is a vital advocate for the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people now under siege by the Asad regime. I encourage the United States Senate to show our support for Ambassador Ford by confirming him as soon as possible, so he can continue, fully confirmed, his critical and courageous work.

Now, I'm delighted to welcome the foreign minister. Minister Ashiru is a great diplomat. He's been serving his country for many years and we had an opportunity today to follow up on the meeting that I had in New York with President Jonathan. We have worked closely with the people and Government of Nigeria over the last two and a half years to make progress in key areas.

The U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission is our flagship agreement for bilateral cooperation on the entire African continent. When we signed the agreement just 17 months ago, we set bold goals for ourselves. Today, the foreign minister and I discussed how far we have come in each area of the commission, including advancing good governance, promoting energy access and reliability, improving food security, dealing with extremism, and so much else.

Our joint efforts leading up to Nigeria's elections in April deserve particular attention because we worked so closely with the government and civil society to improve transparency, to address the political and logistical challenges of the elections. And for the first time in recent history, Nigeria held elections that were widely hailed as credible and effective. And we know that over 90 percent of Nigerians thought the elections were free and fair. That is up from 30 percent just a short four years ago. So the people of Nigeria are making strides every day and consolidating their democracy and the institutions of democracy.

Nigeria has also played an important role on global issues through its seat on the UN Security Council and has been a leader in helping to improve stability in West Africa. Nigeria played a key role in supporting the difficult democratic transitions in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Niger. Nigeria's own example of credible elections provides it with great credibility in democracy promotion across the continent.

So as we continue our close cooperation through the second year of our Binational Commission, we will set forth our priorities, and they include improving governance, fighting corruption, delivering services more effectively to the people. We are working toward a strong anticorruption agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and other ways we can promote transparency.

Economic development is key; Nigeria is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, with the largest population in Africa and strong trading relationships. We want to see Nigeria prosper and grow. To this end, the United States Overseas Private Investment Corporation, OPIC, has just approved \$250 million in financing to help revitalize the Union Bank of Nigeria, and to reach previously un-banked people in Nigeria. And we will look for ways to support Nigeria as it reduces inequality and builds a broader base for prosperity.

Finally, we will stand with Nigeria as it faces serious security issues. The bombing of the UN headquarters in Abuja last month was a horrific and cowardly act, and we want to work with Nigeria and West Africa to improve security and to make sure that we also address the legitimate needs of people before extremists have a chance to exploit them.

So again, Minister, our goals for the second year of the Binational Commission are just as ambitious as our goals for the first. We look forward to working closely with you, and I thank you for your long-standing commitment to the relationship between our two countries.

FOREIGN MINISTER ASHIRU: I thank you, Secretary of State Clinton. It's a pleasure for me to be here, and we've had useful discussions with our American counterparts and we discussed issues of mutual concern to our two countries. Our relations is now anchored under the BNC, the Binational Commission, which was signed earlier this year. And in the Commission there are various sectors and we discussed areas of enhancing and promoting relations and attraction of investment, especially in the energy and power sector.

I reiterated the fact to the Secretary of State that the U.S. companies should take advantage of the boom that we foresee in the nearest future in the energy sector, and that the U.S. companies should not sit on the fence as they did when we had the telecoms boom in Nigeria. We should not allow their competitors to go reaping only from Nigeria, and now this is the time for them to move into Nigeria and take part in the energy boom which we foresee. And there are many notable U.S. companies that are the leading players, especially in manufacturing of turbines and so on. We believe this is the time for them to come to Nigeria and invest. And we see a big market for the energy sector in Nigeria.

And of course, we also open our doors to other companies in the agricultural and rural transportation sector to also come into Nigeria because we now having an agricultural boom. We are (inaudible); we are turning agriculture in Nigeria to mechanized farming, and we believe they have the expertise. They should now join the others who are already in Nigeria to come and see this transformation and let's partake in it together. Of course, Secretary of State Clinton has already reviewed a number of the issues we discussed on the bilateral sides and

also on the international arena. So with those few remarks, I say, Madam Secretary, thank you very much for this --

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you so much, Minister Ashiru. Thank you.

MR. TONER: Time for just two questions today. The first goes to Jill Dougherty of CNN.

QUESTION: Thank you. Madam Secretary, thanks for the comments about the attack in Syria. If you had anything further to add, especially about your level of concern for the safety of the ambassador, we'd be more than happy to hear it. I do have just two questions.

One concerns Uzbekistan. The President spoke with the President Karimov last night, and then also you met with the Uzbek foreign minister. Did you discuss expanding the Northern Distribution Network for Afghanistan? And does the Administration support expanding -- or I should say dropping restrictions on military equipment that can be sold to the Uzbeks in spite of the concerns about potential human rights violations.

And just -- I'm sorry -- one other question. I represent a lot of journalists.

SECRETARY CLINTON: (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Maybe one is optional. (Inaudible) But there is interest among my colleagues in the continuing questions about Pakistan. There was an interview with Admiral Mullen. He's not stepping away from those comments about the veritable arm, the Haqqani Network. Why is the Administration or parts of the Administration stepping back from those comments in spite of what he is saying?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Jill, if I can remember them -- (laughter) -- the first one, with respect to Ambassador Ford, we've raised this ugly, unfortunate incident to the highest levels of the Syrian Government. We are demanding that the Syrian Government take all necessary steps to protect our Embassy, to protect our diplomats in accordance with the international obligations that every country must abide by. And this is absolutely required. The Vienna Convention requires that host countries protect property and persons of diplomatic missions. And I must say that this inexcusable assault is clearly part of an ongoing campaign of intimidation aimed at not only American diplomats but diplomats from other countries, foreign observers who are raising questions about what's going on inside Syria. It reflects an intolerance on the part of the regime and its supporters, and it is deeply regrettable that we have the Asad regime continuing its campaign of violence against its own people.

So I hope that, first and foremost, our property, our -- the persons that serve in our mission will be protected along with every other diplomat from every other country. But secondly, we continue to call for an end to the violence, and we'll continue to speak out, and I think Ambassador Ford's courage and clarity is making the point that the United States cannot and will not stand idly by when this kind of violence continues.

With respect to Uzbekistan, we value our relationship with Uzbekistan. They have been very helpful to us with respect to the Northern Distribution Network. They have also been helpful with Afghanistan in terms of reconstruction. They are deeply involved in assisting Afghans and the Afghan Government to try to rebuild and make Afghanistan a more prosperous, peaceful country. We believe that our continuing dialogue with officials of the government is essential. It always raises, as I have and as others from our government continue to do so, our concerns about human rights and political freedoms. But at the same time we are working with the Uzbeks to make progress, and we are seeing some signs of that, and we would clearly like to deepen our relationship on all issues.

Finally, with respect to Pakistan, I would certainly urge people to look at the entirety of Admiral Mullen's testimony. He did raise serious questions, which our government has raised with the Pakistanis about the continuing safe haven for terrorists that strike across the border in Afghanistan against Afghans, Americans, NATO ISAF troops, civilians working there, as well as within Pakistan. But Admiral Mullen also said that this is a very critical consequential relationship. We have a lot of interests that are in common, most particularly the fight against terrorism. So we are certainly making clear that we want to see an end to safe havens and any kind of support from anywhere for terrorists inside Pakistan, and we also want to continue to work to put our relationship on a stronger footing.

MR. TONER: Next question goes to Peter (inaudible) from News Agency of Nigeria.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary of State, thank you very much for your firm belief in Nigeria, for your very open comment about our country. My question is on security in Nigeria. Will the U.S. support the Nigerian Government to go into dialogue with Boko Haram while there are ongoing killings on the streets of Maiduguri? And in the last 48 hours we have had unconfirmed reports from the extremist group saying they will disrupt the independence day celebrations.

And if you can indulge me one more question, you told us that you discuss with the minister – your meeting with the minister this afternoon, there was a follow-up on what you discussed with President Goodluck Jonathan, who attended General Assembly last week in New York. Did you raise the issue of Palestine with the minister, and what did our president tell you about Nigerians (inaudible) and preference if the issue of the Palestinian statehood should come to the Security Council?

Thank you very much.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first with respect to Boko Haram, we have condemned its deadly use of violence. We think that its attacks on ordinary citizens, on institutions of the Nigerian state, on the United Nations office in Abuja, are absolutely unjustifiable. There is no set or principles or beliefs that can justify taking the lives of innocent people, and we offer our deepest condolences to all those families who have lost loved ones in these senseless attacks.

At the same time, we are working with Nigeria to try to develop capabilities to provide better security, to strengthen the security sector, because we think that some terrorist and extremist groups are absolutely unreconcilable. They cannot be convinced to end their violence and participate in society. But where there is an opportunity for any dialogue or outreach, we would support that. We certainly have around the world. But we also know that it has to be both at the same time. There has to be a strong, effective security response and an effort to try to remove the reasons why people would, in any way, condone or support this kind of terrorism.

And maybe – let me stop here and let the minister respond to that as well, and then I can answer your second question.

FOREIGN MINISTER ASHIRU: Yes. I can assure you that we had a useful discussion on that with the Secretary of State (inaudible) to offer support and assistance to Nigeria to combat this issue of terrorism. You see, no one country can handle this issue on its own, so it has to be multilateral and multifaceted. And from all our meetings, we've received assurances of support to help Nigeria in this new wave, which of course, as you rightly know, is much new to us in Nigeria. But we believe that our government is on top of the situation and they will continue to develop expertise and capability to manage and curtail this new menace that we have.

SECRETARY CLINTON: With respect to your second question, the minister and I had a good discussion of these issues today. I had the opportunity to talk to President Jonathan, as did President Obama, last week at the United Nations General Assembly. We believe strongly, and we have certainly communicated that to the

president and the foreign minister, that the only route to a Palestinian state, which we want to see happen, is through negotiations. We know that whatever does or doesn't happen in the United Nations will not create a state, and our goal is to see two states living side by side in peace and security.

The Quartet statement that was issued last Friday calls for a return to negotiations. We hope that Nigeria, who is a friend of both Israel and to the Palestinians, will tell both of them, get back to the negotiating table, because that's where the differences must be resolved. It is the only place where we can get a durable and lasting peace, but we have certainly made it clear to all of our friends that we want to see a return to negotiations. Anything which is done that disrupts that or detours that is a postponement of the outcome that we are all seeking.

Thank you all very much.

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